

CASA's 2022 Pre-Budget Submission



CASA
Canadian Alliance of
Student Associations

ACAE

Alliance canadienne des
associations étudiantes

Executive Summary

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) is a national, not-for-profit, nonpartisan student organization composed of 24 student associations across Canada representing undergraduate, graduate, college, and polytechnic students. Including our partnership with the Quebec Student Union, CASA represents a total of 365,000 students across the country. CASA advocates for a Canadian post-secondary education system that is accessible, affordable, innovative, and of the highest quality.

Post-secondary students across the country have felt the full force of the COVID-19 pandemic and require the federal government's continued support to ensure they succeed. While substantive investments have recently been made in supports like the Canada Student Grant and the Student Loans Repayment Assistance Program, more is needed to support those unable to access these investments. Additionally, many students continue to struggle with the auxiliary costs of attending post-secondary, such as paying for a computer, Internet, and textbooks. Thus, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations has developed a suite of recommendations that aim to support Canadian students ineligible for supports such as the Canada Student Grant, while also building a more innovative

and affordable post-secondary system that can keep up with Canada's changing labour market needs.

Recommendations:

1. Create an up-front, non-repayable Canada Student Grant for graduate students with financial need at an estimated cost of \$58 million per year.
2. Amend the disbursement dates of the Apprenticeship Incentive Grants to provide up-front support to apprentices as they begin their in-study periods.
3. Increase the computer and computer-related costs maximum within the CSFA Program's needs-assessment to \$750 per loan year.
4. Create a pilot program within the Canada Research Granting Agencies, at an estimated cost of \$10 million annually, that provides grant funding to graduate students and post-secondary faculty to develop innovative and affordable OERs that would be available in both official languages
5. Ensure the Canada Research Granting Agencies prioritize Open Access formats for knowledge mobilization of funded academic work.

Preparing Canadians for the Jobs of Tomorrow with Up-Front Financial Assistance

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a huge toll on the Canadian economy and has brought about fundamental changes to how we work and study. The pandemic-induced economic downturn has been felt unevenly across the socioeconomic spectrum, with layoffs and lost wages being disproportionately shouldered by visible minorities and youth working in precarious low-wage sectors such as retail, tourism, and food services.¹ In addition, the pandemic has also accelerated pre-existing labour market trends around automation, technology, and sustainability, as more Canadians work from home and businesses double-down on implementing new technologies to make their operations more eco-friendly.² What is more, even prior to the pandemic, Canada had been confronting a growing labour shortage across the country, which is only expected to worsen as our population ages.³ Taken together, Canada is facing a set of labour market conditions that illustrate a growing

need for federal investment in reskilling, continued education, and training programs that will help Canadians access the new jobs of tomorrow.



The jobs of tomorrow will be plentiful, but it will require serious investment to re-skill and train Canada's workforce to properly meet the needs of the future. Even prior to the pandemic, 31% of Canadian businesses reported being unable to find workers to meet their labour demands, with "not enough applicants" and "lack [of] required hard skills" registering as the

¹ "COVID-19 in Canada: A One-year Update on Social and Economic Impacts," Statistics Canada, 11 March 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2021001-eng.htm#a4>.

² Tiff Macklem, "Canada's labour market: rebound, recuperation and restructuring," Bank of Canada, 23 February 2021, <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/2021/02/canadas-labour-market-rebound-recuperation-and-restructuring/>; "Chapter 2: Forecasts for Labour Market Evolution in 2020-2025," in The Future of Jobs Report 2020, World Economic Forum, 20 October 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020/in-full/chapter-2-forecasts-for-labour-market-evolution-in-2020-2025#2-2-emerging-and-declining-jobs>.

³ "Addressing Labour Shortages -- Current Labour Market Conditions," Employment and Social Development Canada, 20 September 2019, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/employment-social-development/corporate/reports/briefing-binder-2019/infographics/labour-shortage-en.pdf>.

top reasons for these hiring difficulties.⁴ Additionally, according to McKinsey, “up to 25 percent more workers than previously estimated [are] potentially needing to switch occupations [due to COVID-19],” further exacerbating the need for a comprehensive and proactive government reskilling effort.⁵

The World Economic Forum (WEF) also estimates that the jobs of tomorrow will reflect ongoing trends unfolding today: namely, the transition to a digital and green economy. According to their 2020 report on the future of work, WEF estimates that the most in-demand jobs of the future include opportunities like Robotics Engineers, Mechanics and Machinery Repairers, and Data Analysts and Scientists, all of which require considerable specialized training and education.⁶

Seeing the beginnings of this generational labour market transformation, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that the federal government provide adequate financial support to any Canadian looking to re-skill or up-skill as they look to switch careers. Fortunately, Budget 2021 provides significant financial assistance to undergraduate and college students

by doubling Canada Student Grants within the Student Financial Assistance Program.⁷ This increase is laudable, however, it does not help the hundreds of thousands of post-secondary students in Canada studying in graduate or apprenticeship programs, as they are not eligible for Canada Student Grants.

With a future labour market that will demand the skills of highly trained master’s and PhD graduates, Canada cannot afford to create barriers to continued study. Unfortunately, the fact that Canada Student Grants remain unavailable to graduate students creates a major gap in financial aid for those not fortunate enough to have secured an academic scholarship or research funding from the Canada Research Granting Agencies (CRGA). In fact, four in ten Canadian post-secondary students report financial concerns and debt impacting their decision on whether or not they will continue their education following a Bachelor’s degree.⁸ And while a small number of graduate students receive research scholarships from the CRGA, these awards are only provided to approximately 2% of master’s students.⁹ As a result, a large and growing number of graduate students in Canada are entering their studies with less up-front,

4 “Skills of the Canadian workforce,” in Workforce Innovation to Foster Positive Learning Environments in Canada, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 30 April 2020, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/2b95c0dc-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/2b95c0dc-en>.

5 Susan Lund et al., “The future of work after COVID-19,” McKinsey Global Institute, 18 February 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-after-covid-19#>.

6 “Chapter 2: Forecasts for Labour Market Evolution in 2020–2025,” in The Future of Jobs Report 2020, World Economic Forum, 20 October 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020/in-full/chapter-2-forecasts-for-labour-market-evolution-in-2020-2025#2-2-emerging-and-declining-jobs>.

7 “Budget 2021: A Recovery Plan for Jobs, Growth, and Resilience,” Finance Canada, 19 April 2021, pg. 108.

8 “2018 Graduating Student Survey Master Report: June 2018,” Canadian University Survey Consortium, June 2018, <https://cusc-ccreu.ca/?download=376>.

9 Canada Graduate Scholarship – Master’s Program, Natural Science and Engineering Research Council, retrieved on 3 August 2021, https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/PG-CS/CGSM-BESCM_eng.asp.

non-repayable aid than they had during their undergraduate degree, all while being more likely to encounter higher tuition and an increased cost of living.

Likewise, prospective apprentices are equally ineligible for Canada Student Grants and are more likely to face an assortment of challenges while in-study related to family responsibilities and financial obligations. According to Statistics Canada, financial constraints are one of the most-cited reasons students provide for abandoning their apprenticeship.¹⁰ While the Government of Canada provides considerable support to apprentices through various grant and loan programs, little support is provided in an up-front manner to assist with the high initial cost barrier of pursuing an apprenticeship. For example, the Apprenticeship Incentive Grant (AIG) -- the federal government's main non-repayable financial aid program for prospective apprentices -- provides a \$1,000 grant that may be redeemed twice by an apprentice. However, to claim this grant, an apprentice must have finished their first level of school and training. While the AIG is an important

program to support apprentices as they progress through their studies, it does not alleviate the high initial cost barrier that students must overcome to access training. Specifically, first year apprentices sometimes spend up to \$8,000 during study and work periods to cover the cost of equipment, tuition, and transportation to and from job sites.¹¹ These costs are prohibitive, and can be an access barrier for many prospective apprentices with little latitude to initially invest in their education.

Therefore, CASA recommends that the federal government reduce financial barriers to graduate and apprenticeship education to fill future labour market needs by:

- Creating an up-front, non-repayable Canada Student Grant for graduate students with financial need at an estimated cost of \$58 million per year.
- Amending the disbursement dates of the Apprenticeship Incentive Grants to provide up-front support to apprentices as they begin their in-study periods.

¹⁰ Jin Hyeongsuk et al., "Factors associated with the completion of apprenticeship training in Canada," Statistics Canada, 9 December 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/nl/pub/75-006-x/2020001/article/00008-eng.htm>.

¹¹ "Barriers to Attracting Apprentices and Completing Their Apprenticeships," Employment Ontario, 2015, https://www.workforcedevelopment.ca/fr/projets/docs/2015_2016/wpdb_apprenticeship_report.pdf.

Modernizing Canada's Student Financial Assistance Program to Reflect Today's Cost of Living

The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for post-secondary students across Canada, and has accelerated many unwelcome trends around affordability and access. These trends are multifaceted and complex, but they include challenges like access to technology and Internet, struggles in paying rent and utilities, as well as affording essential goods and services like transit, counselling, and groceries. The Canada Student Financial Assistance Program (CSFA Program), consisting of Canada Student Grants

and Canada Student Loans, does good work in assisting students afford the myriad costs of post-secondary education. But while Canada Student Grants have doubled since 2019, much to the appreciation of students across the country, various elements of the CSFA Program's needs-assessment have not kept pace with the rising cost of attending post-secondary education.

For instance, in a physically distanced and online post-secondary environment, access to on-campus technology has been severely curtailed, as many students no longer physically present on their campus to utilize the school's technological resources. As a result, many more students have had to invest in new technology, or make do with what they could access in their local communities. Indeed, according to a recent CASA poll conducted with Abacus Data, 47% of post-secondary students reported not having access to the technology they needed to



sufficiently participate in digital learning.¹² Furthermore, 55% said they were unable to access a reliable high-speed Internet connection.¹³ These access concerns are an ever-present and growing reality for many post-secondary students, and in its current form, the CSFA Program does not adequately assess these costs.

As it stands, the CSFA Program calculates the costs of “computers and computer-related costs” as part of its financial assistance needs-assessment, federally capping possible aid at \$300 per loan year.¹⁴ Students see this as insufficient, as computers and computer-related costs often greatly exceed \$300 per academic year. According to PC Magazine, a

functional laptop for educational purposes can often cost between \$500 and \$876, making a \$300 allocation greatly deficient.¹⁵ Moreover, monthly Internet costs, which could reasonably be defined as “computer-related costs”, often run upwards of \$80 per month, making a \$300 envelope under the CSFA Program even more inadequate.¹⁶

Because of this disparity, CASA recommends that the federal government increase the computer and computer-related costs maximum within the CSFA Program’s needs-assessment to \$750 per loan year

¹² “Continued Concerns: Post-Secondary Students On Year into COVID-19,” Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 22 June 2021, https://www.casa-acae.com/concerns_2021.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Canada-Saskatchewan Integrated Student Loans Program Administrative Guidelines,” Government of Saskatchewan, 2019, <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/archived/79345/Canada-Sask%252BStudent%252BLoan%252BAdmin%252BGuidelines%252B2019-20.pdf>.

¹⁵ \$400 to \$700 USD converted to CAD; Tom Brant, “The Best Budget Laptops for 2021,” PC Magazine,

¹⁶ June 2021, <https://www.pcmag.com/picks/the-best-budget-laptops>.

¹⁶ “Communications Monitoring Report 2021,” Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, last modified on 21 January 2020, <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/policymonitoring/2019/cmr2.htm#a1.0>.

Lowering Textbook Costs & Supporting Official Language Education

A high-quality post-secondary education in Canada requires a student body that is easily able to afford and access their educational materials, such as textbooks. As it stands, a post-secondary student in Canada can expect to spend between \$800 and \$1,000 per year to purchase their required textbooks and other necessary materials.¹⁷ This presents significant affordability barriers for low-income students who are struggling to afford these materials. Due to these costs, roughly 54% of students in Canada have stated that they have not purchased a required textbook at least once during their studies.¹⁸ Even more alarmingly, 43% of students report to have dropped a class, or forgoed registering for a class, due the required textbook costs.¹⁹ Open educational resources (OERs) offer an innovative and affordable solution to this problem.

OERs are “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that

permits their free use and repurposing by others.”²⁰ For example, OERs could be textbooks, tests, lesson plans, lecture notes, videos, case studies, software, or any other course tools. Because they are affordable and highly adaptable, this innovative learning tool greatly benefits both students and educators.



Notably, OERs save students money while supporting their overall educational success. In British Columbia, a provincial grant program supporting OER development has successfully

¹⁷ “Budgeting for student life,” Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, last modified on 11 June 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/financial-consumer-agency/services/budget-student-life.html>.

¹⁸ Rajiv Jhangiani and Surita Jhangiani, “Investigating the Perceptions, Use, and Impact of Open Textbooks: A Survey of Post-Secondary Students in British Columbia,” *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 18, no. 4 (June 2017): 172–192, <http://www.irrod.org/index.php/irrod/article/view/3012/4214>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Open Education,” Creative Commons, retrieved on 28 July 2021, <https://creativecommons.org/about/program-areas/education-oer/>.

helped over 220,000 students save more than \$26 million since 2012.²¹ This is significant, especially considering that 30% of respondents in a BC survey reported earning a poorer grade in a course because of textbook costs.²²

Unfortunately, while there has been significant progress on OER development at the provincial level in Canada, there has been little action taken at the federal level. That said, the federal government does have a role to play in supporting Canadians who wish to obtain a high quality and well-rounded post-secondary education, and to do so in the official language of their choice.

As it currently stands, OER repositories in Canada, such as eCampus Ontario, BC Campus, and Pressbooks Directory, rely heavily on English-language resources. While it is now easier than ever for English instructors to find an OER that suits their course content, French instructors are often hamstrung due to a lack of choice in their available resources. For example, eCampus Ontario features a collection of 616 OERs in their open library, but only 58 of those are available in French.²³ Likewise,

Pressbooks offers a massive catalogue of 2,587 open resources, but only 72 of those are available in French.²⁴ This gap between English and French OERs is concerning, and presents a unique opportunity for the federal government to make French-language education more affordable across the country.

Therefore, CASA recommends federal action to support the development of OERs in both official languages. Specifically, CASA recommends:

- That the federal government create a pilot program within the Canada Research Granting Agencies, at an estimated cost of \$10 million annually, that provides grant funding to graduate students and post-secondary faculty to develop innovative and affordable OERs that would be available in both official languages.
- That the Government of Canada ensures the Canada Research Granting Agencies prioritize Open Access formats for knowledge mobilization of funded academic work.

21 "Known Open Textbook Adoptions in B.C.," BC Campus OpenEd, retrieved on 27 July 2021, <https://open.bccampus.ca/open-textbook-stats/>.

22 Rajiv Jhangiani and Surita Jhangiani, "Investigating the Perceptions, Use, and Impact of Open Textbooks: A Survey of Post-Secondary Students in British Columbia," *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 18, no. 4 (June 2017): 172–192, <http://www.irrodi.org/index.php/irrodi/article/view/3012/4214>.

23 "eCampus Library - Open Library Filters, Languages," eCampus Ontario, retrieved on 21 July 2021, <https://search.ecampusontario.ca/?itemTypes=6&sourceWebsiteTypes=3&sortCol=2>.

24 "Welcome to Pressbooks Directory - Filters, Language," Pressbooks Directory, retrieved on 21 July 2021, <https://pressbooks.directory/>.

Our Members



About CASA

Established in 1995, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit, student organization composed of 24 student associations representing 365,000 post-secondary students from coast to coast. Through its

partnership with the Quebec Students Union (QSU), CASA presents a national student voice to the federal government. CASA advocates for a Canadian post-secondary education system that is accessible, affordable, innovative and of the highest quality.



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